Suspended particles can absorb and scatter visible light, thus reducing visibility. Such haze is a national concern for vehicle safety, as well as the aesthetics of parks, historic sites and scenic attractions visited by tourists. In many parts of the United States, the visual range has been reduced 70 percent from natural conditions. In the East, the current range is only 14-24 miles, compared to a natural visibility of 90 miles.

Trends

Particulate levels have decreased steadily in North Carolina over the past two decades. Although TSP concentrations exceeded the standards every year in the 1970s, only one exceedance has occurred since 1990 (**Figure 2**, **Figure 3**).

Monitoring for coarse particulates (PM_{10}) began in 1985, due to a change in National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Since then, PM_{10} concentrations in North Carolina have remained well below the standards, with a general decline from 1985 to 1995 (**Figure 4**, **Figure 5**).

New EPA standards for $PM_{2.5}$ became effective in July 1997, but are not being evaluated in the present report. Although some $PM_{2.5}$ data have been collected in North Carolina in the past, they are not adequate for assessing trends. New $PM_{2.5}$ data will be collected using new sampling methods, beginning in 1998.